

Budapest, 9 Dec 2021

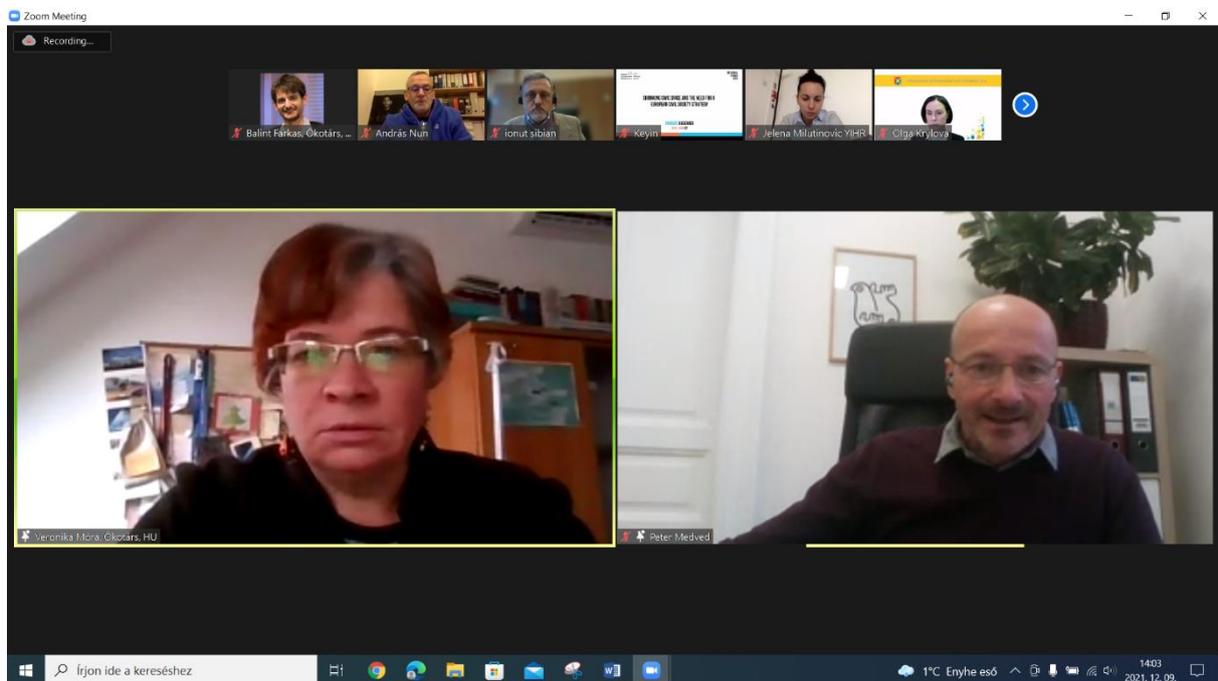
SUMMARY OF A MEETING “SHRINKING CIVIC SPACE AND THE NEED FOR A EUROPEAN CIVIL SOCIETY STRATEGY”

The online event "Shrinking civic space and the need for a European civil society strategy" took place on 9 December 2021 from 13.15 to 14.30 CET as part of the Regional Funds Week of the EEA and Norway Grants. The panel discussion was organised by Ökotárs – the Hungarian Environmental Partnership Foundation, lead partner of the project "Reclaim Our Civil Space!" with participants from the project "New Solutions to Old Problems", both funded by EEA and Norway Grants Fund for Regional Cooperation.

The discussion was facilitated by Veronika Móra, director at Ökotárs, and speakers were:

- Ionut Sibian, Fundația pentru Dezvoltarea Societății Civile, Romania (ROCS project)
- Peter Medved, Nadácia Ekopolis, Slovakia (ROCS project)
- Daniel Grebeldinger, Asociația Nevo Parudimos, Romania (New Solutions)
- András Nun, Autonómia Alapítvány, Hungary (New Solutions)

The discussion aimed at presenting the means and methods of bottom up approaches in capacity building of civil society organisations and to illustrate the importance of connecting grassroots activism on the local level with European wide policy making. As Veronika Móra said: „EU institutions often view CSOs as instrumental in achieving certain policy goals, but do not necessarily recognize the sector as a value and entity itself. This is why we made it our eventual goal to develop and advocate for the passing of a European civil society strategy. We need to put the issue on the EU agenda.”



Speakers agreed that this is especially time with a view of the shrinking civic space observed for the past years particularly in Central and South-eastern Europe. Many CSOs face smear campaigns often because of their sheer existence, and according to András Nun „they are not accepted as agents of change, they are not taken seriously and lack acceptance and recognition”.

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Hence both projects prepare citizen groups – both institutionally and mentally – to defend themselves. Their bottom up approaches of capacity building help grassroots initiatives to professionalize and to gain skills in legal and financial matters. Panelists emphasized that these civic groups also need to learn how to communicate their mission and need to cooperate with and inspire other actors of the civil society. This is how civil society becomes more resilient, and developing these skills is the key to collective action and policy making on the European level: advocating for a structured European approach, which strengthens civil society through networking, knowledge transfer and many more.

These proposals now seem to be heard: e.g. Anna Donáth, MEP in the Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs, has recently presented a draft report on shrinking civic space, recommending the development and adoption of a civil society strategy to the European Commission.

More info:

"Reclaim Our Civil Space!" – <https://civilspace.eu/>

"New Solutions To Old Problems" – <https://ergonetwork.org/projects/new-solutions/>

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